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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000136

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: BURMA: A KNU PERSPECTIVE ON ETHNICS, PEACE TALKS

REF: A. BANGKOK 1939 (AMBASSADOR ENGAGES FM KASIT)  
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 130 (SHAN STATE UPDATE)  
[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 107 (FIGHTERS DEFECT, OFFENSIVE UNLIKELY)  
[1](#)D. CHIANG MAI 94 (KNU REPORTS)

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary and Comment  
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[1](#)1. (C) In a wide-ranging discussion on September 17, Ner Da Mya, the son of late Karen National Union (KNU) Chairman General Bo Mya, told us that despite the KNU's militarily weakened state, conflict in Karen State could go on for years. He added that the prospect of peace talks between the Burmese regime and KNU is slim, and that the Burma Army may attack the KNU's Fifth Brigade in the near future. He also pleaded for the U.S. or Thailand to play a coordinating role among the ethnic groups to militarily resist the Burmese regime.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: For some time now, several contacts have speculated on when/where the Burma Army would attack one ethnic group or the other (Refs B-D). From the Thai side of the border, we have yet to see definitive evidence that any such attack is imminent, though we have received credible reports of the Burma Army reinforcing positions close to the border area with Chiang Mai Province. We have no indication the Burmese request to FM Kasit Piromya to renew facilitation of talks between the Burmese regime and KNU (Ref A) has led to any concrete results. End Summary and Comment.

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The Conflict Won't End Soon  
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[1](#)3. (C) According to Ner Da, despite the anti-regime KNU's military weakness, the conflict in Burma's Karen State could go on for years. "We are running out of weapons and ammunition, and we don't have any bases" he said, and it will be difficult for us to defeat the Burma Army (BA) in Karen State. On the other hand, because of the KNU's successful use of guerrilla

tactics, the regime cannot defeat us either, he opined. He assessed that without a military solution, victory for either side in the over 50 years of fighting between the KNU and BA was not in sight. For its part, he said BA troops have low morale and do not want to fight. They use psychological operations against us, he asserted, and said the KNU needs to do the same.

¶4. (C) Ner Da corroborated reports (Ref C) that some fighters from the pro-regime Democratic Karen Buddhist Army had defected back to the KNU. He asserted, however, that these fighters had not been assimilated into KNU ranks, lamenting that "they are the first to flee when the BA attacks us." As for the pro-regime KNU/KNLA Peace Council, Ner Da asserted that none of its fighters had rejoined the KNU.

¶5. (C) Some small skirmishes have taken place recently in the KNU's Fifth Brigade area, Ner Da stated, noting that he expected the BA's next attack against the KNU would come in that area, though he could not specify when. If the BA attacks Eh Htu Hta (a camp housing some 4,000 IDPs on the Burma side of the Salween River across from Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province), we will be unable to defend it, he bemoaned. Ner Da also noted that BA troops had not abandoned the KNU bases they took over in June 2009, thereby preventing the KNU from recovering those outposts as it had successfully done after losing bases to previous BA offensives.

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No Peace Talks for Now  
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¶6. (C) In response to a question about the possibility of starting peace talks between the Burmese regime and the KNU, Ner Da characterized the prospects as nonexistent for the time-being. "When my father went to Rangoon, there was a process and it seemed like the regime wanted to negotiate," he said. "Now, there are no mediators, and nothing to talk about," he added. Separately, Royal Thai Army contacts told us that army units based in Mae Sot (Tak Province) have in recent months repeatedly held several KNU battalion commanders in temporary custody, urging them to stop "making trouble" for the Thai-Burma bilateral relationship. Our RTA contacts admitted that the decision to take this step was made locally, without instructions from Bangkok. Another KNU contact alleged on September 23 that pro-Burmese regime Democratic Karen Buddhist Army soldiers had been hired to assassinate KNU leaders inside Thailand.

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We Need A Coordinator and Money  
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¶7. (C) Turning to the lack of cooperation among the ethnic armed groups, Ner Da desperately appealed for the U.S. or Thailand to help coordinate ethnic military resistance against the Burmese regime. The Burma Army's morale is low, the general public doesn't like the current regime, and those ethnic groups that have ceasefires with the regime are unhappy with the

arrangement, he argued. (Note: A report produced by the National Democratic Front -- a coalition of ethnic opposition groups -- on various ceasefire groups seems to lend credence to the last of these assertions.) We need money to mount psy-ops against the BA, he pleaded. It would be easy for us to defeat the regime if we had money, weapons, and a coordination mechanism, he claimed. P/E Chief reminded Ner Da that it is USG policy not to fund armed resistance against the Burmese regime.

18. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassies Bangkok and Rangoon.  
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